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SUBJECT: HAITIAN-AMERICAN ENTREPRENEUR SIMEUS: A PRESIDENT  
FOR AN OWNERSHIP SOCIETY

Classified By: Ambassador James B. Foley, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Haitian-American businessman Dumas Simeus declared his intention to run for President during a lively discussion with the Ambassador on June 10. Simeus, a self-made millionaire currently residing in Texas, said he would manage Haiti like a business and lead the country by example, promoting changes in both policies and behavior that would lead to peace, security and growth. The candidate brushed aside any challenge his American citizenship might pose, arguing that if the people believe in him, his double nationality won't matter. While he recognized the job would be thankless and require great personal (and financial) sacrifice, he claimed he was the only person who could give the people both hope and responsible leadership - running as a populist but governing from the center as an experienced manager. Simeus said he has been courted by Protestant parties MOCHRENA and UNCHR and would begin his campaign in July. End summary.

¶2. (C) Displaying abundant charm and energy, the 65-year-old Simeus said he had decided to run for President not only for Haiti's benefit, but also as a gesture of thanks to the United States. He lamented that the U.S. had squandered so many resources in Haiti due to poor leadership and vowed he would rule Haiti with American values. The University of Chicago alum pledged to bring the "Chicago boys" to Haiti and establish a roadmap for change, promising investors would return if there was credible leadership. Simeus said Haiti's "way out" was access to capital, and he could explain to the people how an ownership society benefits all. He also backed an international investment fund (similar to those used in Eastern Europe in the 1990s) managed by international fund managers, and advocated pegging the Gourde to the US Dollar - allowing the government to raise the money supply, he said, without inflation.

¶3. (C) Simeus said he had decided to run for President rather than Prime Minister because he wanted the mandate of the people in order to use the bully pulpit of the office of Head of State to change people's mentality. Under the banner, "Shadow of the Leader," Simeus planned to lead by example, setting new standards for values and performance and expecting others to follow. He said a massive public education campaign was needed to change Haitian mentality. He also vowed to create "social policemen" in an effort to encourage mutual respect among citizens. He said he fully intended to do what current PM Latorue has not done effectively: communicate directly with the people.

¶4. (C) One major uncertainty, Simeus acknowledged, was the choice and role of the Prime Minister. Somewhat belatedly in the conversation, Simeus admitted that the PM would be responsible for implementing and managing many of the programs he advocated. He said, "because of my background, it may be necessary for the PM to co-govern with me" if he is not a good manager. Simeus was adamant that the PM have a proven track record of running a complex organization, something rare among Haitian politicians. Simeus conceded that finding such a PM would be difficult and power sharing would be delicate.

¶5. (C) Simeus sidestepped the constitutional challenges posed by his American citizenship, saying he had acquired U.S. citizenship but had never given up Haitian citizenship (he still has a Haitian passport). He admitted that the Constitution prohibited even double nationality candidates, but said, "the Constitution prohibited the disbandment of the army too, but that did not stop them from doing it." (He also noted that the interim President and IGOH were both unconstitutional). He said his campaign would label him "an authentic Haitian" and that his peasant Creole language and outreach would secure him enough popular support to overwhelm Constitutional objections to his candidacy. "If the people believe in me," he said, "the qualifications won't matter." In a second meeting on June 14, Simeus told the Ambassador he would relinquish his U.S. nationality if that eventually proved necessary in order to get on the ballot.

16. (C) During his recent visit to Haiti, Simeus has met with leaders of both large Protestant Parties: Luc Mesadieu of MOCHRENA and Chavannes Jeunes of UNCHR. Simeus scoffed at the management capabilities of both party leaders. Simeus also planned to meet businessman Andy Apaid. The Ambassador warned Simeus to make sure people did not perceive him as linked to the G184. Simeus said he planned to reach out to Lavalas leaders as well and explain to them that they could return to power again when "I am done fixing the country." He said he may send his associates with strong Lavalas ties to South Africa to meet with Aristide and ask him to support elections in Haiti.

17. (C) Simeus said he would begin his campaign in July. He pointedly asked about the security situation and whether the U.S. was going to contribute to making the elections feasible from a security perspective. He also acknowledged the dangers to his personal safety he would face upon entering the race.

18. (C) Comment: On paper and in person Simeus looks like a potentially viable candidate: one who could not only win the race but also lead Haiti in a way it desperately needs to be led -- someone who could connect with the impoverished majority, a la Aristide, but govern responsibly and maybe effectively. As such, he will be a threat to almost the entire political class and important segments of the business community. They will surely unite to attempt to disqualify Simeus because of his U.S. nationality. Whether he has the toughness to survive the rough and tumble of Haitian politics remains to be seen. He will also require an effective security apparatus to ensure his personal safety from likely threats from different quarters. He intends to reach out to the Lavalas base (starting in Cite Soleil) and will not criticize Aristide, but his candidacy will be seen as a mortal threat by the former president himself. The key question is whether he is able to electrify the poor Haitian masses, as he confidently predicts. If he can, the elections in Haiti - which are viewed skeptically by the public not only because of the mounting violence, but also because of the depressing cast of traditional politicians running for the Presidency - might begin to take on new meaning as a potential vehicle for change. End comment.

FOLEY